

## What are the impacts of architectural design on occupants' well-being, and how can architects optimize spaces to enhance productivity?

**Shakhzoda Mubinova**

[shakhzoda.mubinova@gmail.com](mailto:shakhzoda.mubinova@gmail.com)

**Merve Kevser Gokgol**

[mgokgol@harmonytx.org](mailto:mgokgol@harmonytx.org)

### Abstract

In the context of rising urbanization and the growing enhancement of green architecture, architectural design is a topic of increasing importance. This study examines the detailed relationship between architectural design and the human experience, emphasizing the significant effects of design decisions on people's well-being. The research delves into the psychological effects of architectural design and explores how architects can optimize spaces to increase occupants' productivity and well-being while taking environmental sustainability and cost-efficiency into account. Numerous studies have demonstrated the critical relationship between indoor environmental conditions and occupant well-being. This study examines the relationships between architecture and the effects that various elements have on inhabitants' moods, behavior, and general well-being, including ventilation, lighting, color, layout, and biophilic design. Further, it discusses possible solutions that could be implemented, such as eco-friendly architectural design, adaptable floor plans, biophilic design principles, and a variety of color and aesthetic decisions to create environments that foster occupant comfort, creativity, and productivity. The study does, however, identify a few limitations including the possible financial effects of incorporating sustainable design elements. Architects can play a critical role in creating environments that improve the quality of life and productivity of their occupants while respecting the environment and budgetary constraints by taking into account the psychological effects of design choices and advocating for innovative, sustainable, and occupant-centric design approaches.

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## 1. Introduction

Architecture serves to enhance human experience in a space with profound implications for both individual well-being and societal dynamics. In this era of rapid urbanization and a rise in green architecture, there has been an increase in designing high-performance buildings (Liu et al., 2022). Architectural design extends far beyond aesthetics and functionality. With the introduction of new technologies such as energy-efficient lighting and HVAC units, interior spaces have completely changed (Lee, 2022). A large number of studies have been conducted in recent years to analyze how different indoor environmental conditions affect occupants' comfort (Colenberg et al., 2020). This research studies the ramifications of architectural design on occupants' psychological well-being and focuses on ways architects can optimize spaces in the future to improve the productivity and well-being of the occupants while taking the environment and costs into consideration.

## 2. Literature Review

Architecture has evolved, transitioning from being solely an art form to a subject of psychological study and purposeful implementation, with a focus on enhancing psychological well-being. Various studies have explored the connection between architecture and the comfort and emotional well-being of occupants. Buildings play a vital role in our health, given their close ties to our energy systems and the changing climate. This leads us to inquire about how different architectural designs affect occupants psychologically. Human behavior is significantly influenced by the environment in which it occurs and the resources available within that environment (Evans, 2003). Factors such as landscape, past experiences, personality traits, and sensory associations impact an individual's response to environmental stimuli (Ricci, 2018). It is evident that the environment influences a person's motivations and efforts, but what about the design itself? Does a pleasing, tranquil design in a noisy environment produce the same effect? When an environment is arousing but unpleasant, we feel panicked and tense, and our sympathetic nervous system is activated; moreover, when the environment is unpleasant but not arousing, we feel unstimulated and bored; boredom, as we have already seen, also leads to stress, and regardless of individual variations, human beings generally favor environments that are pleasant or unpleasant ones (Ricci, 2018). Stimulating and pleasant environments provide mental engagement, making them crucial considerations in architecture and psychology. Human beings are natural information processors, gravitating toward environments that offer ample information for processing. Likewise, good architectural design that enhances a person's productivity finds much of its influence in the patterns of nature. The stress-reducing capabilities of those designs are a direct result of our brains recognizing visual similarities to nature (Ricci, 2018). The beneficial impact of natural design elements goes deeper than an improved sense of psychological well-being though. In multiple studies presented in Ricci's (2018) paper, it was proven that nature could boost brain activity and recovery. In contrast, modern urban architecture often lacks the richness of nature and fails to provide essential mental stimulation. This deficiency not only increases stress but also robs occupants of potential restorative benefits offered by nature. Many articles advocate for incorporating nature-based design into buildings to improve well-being. However, alternative solutions are rarely discussed. Negative physiological impacts of architecture include issues like housing quality, high-rise buildings, and overcrowding, which are

prevalent in urban areas. High-rise buildings, particularly in low-income communities, often lack resources for fostering social networks (Evans, 2003). Overall, most studies show that the integration of nature and consideration of the environment's view in building design has been shown to have the most significant impact on occupants' motivation and productivity.

### 3. Psychological Factors of Design

Architectural design can have significant psychological impacts on occupants, influencing their mood, behavior, and overall well-being. These impacts can be both positive and negative, depending on various design factors. Factors such as ventilation, lighting, noise control systems, and a good choice of interior design are what determine the productivity and well-being of the occupant because their psychological and emotional responses to these factors are what motivate occupants. The degree to which a city's structure and space suit the human body, its senses, and the appropriate scale and proportions of space, is directly related to how comfortable and well-adjusted one feels in a city. When designing in architecture, there is a great emphasis placed on the materials used and the shapes of the structures. Sterile, concrete landscapes and unimaginative buildings, for example, cause higher levels of stress (Vangelatos, 2019). This is due to their lack of natural elements and monotony within the building. They aren't aesthetically appealing to the occupants, thus causing them to be overstimulating which causes higher levels of stress on occupants. Contrastingly, buildings that incorporate the natural elements of the environment around them have helped provide humans with a better place to think and work because the "green" around has made them feel relaxed and at peace with the atmosphere they're in.

Lighting, whether it be natural or artificial, has a significant effect on the mental health of individuals. According to Gillis and Gatersleben (2015), individuals chronically exposed to shorter hours of daylight suffer more sadness, fatigue, and, for some, clinical depression. Proper lighting installments within a building can enhance the visual aesthetics of a place which boost productivity and performance in work and learning environments to concentrate better, make fewer errors, and be more efficient in their tasks. Buildings with little to no wall opening that enable the passage of light affect the occupants negatively because it leads to a lack of productivity. Moreover, color in buildings also leads to different psychological responses by occupants. For example, light colors create a sense of spaciousness in an environment. This also reflects natural light and makes surfaces appear larger to the eyes. The warmer the color is, the more compact the space becomes. They can also evoke feelings of comfort or stimulate communication. According to Ashton (2018), arguably one of the largest impacts architecture can have on mood is whether or not there is adequate space offered in a structure and if the layout is well-designed. In office buildings, for example, having a balance between individual spaces and collaboration spaces is what boosts productivity in the workspace and allows for the well-being of occupants. Similarly, an entrance or the "first impression" of a building has a significant effect on how the occupant will perceive the rest of the building as it can influence their expectations and emotional responses before entering (Ashton, 2018). This ties back to the use of different colors in spaces as different tones can create the illusion of spaciousness or the opposite.

#### **4. The Roles of The Environment On Architectural Design**

Our health is connected to the environment around us and by studying the relationships between design and how the environment affects it, we reveal the role of nature in producing architecture that enhances occupants' well-being. In our modern urbanized world, there is less and less emphasis placed on the importance of nature and its great benefits. Furthermore, human interaction with nature is often lacking in modern-day societies due to societal trends such as urbanization, building design, and lifestyle (Gillis & Gatersleben, 2015). Nature helps us relax, and by incorporating it into the designs of buildings we can produce an atmosphere that reduces stress and increases the productivity and engagement of occupants. A type of design that does just that is called biophilic design. The idea behind biophilic design is to incorporate natural features and systems into the built environment to provide human beings with much-needed exposure to nature (Gillis & Gatersleben, 2015). The positive influence of greenery and daylight is consistent with studies on biophilic design and green space (Colenberg et al., 2020).

There is also a great correlation between the ventilation in design with the occupants' health. The air quality is a key factor in any design. In a study conducted by Evans (2003), it was proven that the chemical properties of building materials themselves can be toxic, and heating and cooking systems affect indoor air quality. Evans (2003) mentions occupants who are exposed to hazardous materials exhibit a variety of psychological distress indicators, such as anxiety and fear, insomnia, feelings of futility and lack of control, pessimism, and fatalism, and even posttraumatic stress disorder. Good ventilation with a constant supply of fresh air can improve cognitive function and concentration. It prevents the buildup of carbon dioxide and increases oxygen levels, which are essential for mental clarity and focus. Furthermore, this emphasis on ventilation in design can be brought back to the practice of biophilic design. By having proper ventilation, there is a connection to the natural elements of fresh air which has been shown to reduce stress and improve productivity in individuals.

#### **5. Solutions**

To enhance the productivity of occupants in a building, architects could optimize spaces using several approaches:

##### **5.1. Green Architectural Design**

Architects may lessen their impact on the environment and enhance the health and productivity of the inhabitants by utilizing sustainable design principles. The installation of solar panels and energy-efficient HVAC systems will boost the building's energy efficiency. Utilizing eco-friendly, non-toxic materials will contribute to better indoor air quality and decrease exposure to dangerous chemicals, both of which have a positive impact on occupants' health. Last but not least, architects can create durable structures by applying sustainable design principles. A well-maintained structure gives its occupants a more pleasant environment.

##### **5.2. Flexible Layouts**

The creation of adaptable and flexible spaces with a balance of collaboration and private rooms provides inhabitants with control over their environment and increases satisfaction. For

collaboration, architects could utilize open floor plans, and for privacy, they could establish quiet spaces with soundproof technology. Moreover, ensuring design is accessible to all individuals, particularly people with disabilities, creates diversity in work-spaces.

### **5.3. Biophilic Design**

As noted in our earlier research, the environment has a significant effect on how we feel, and biophilic design has been found to boost creativity and lower stress. Architects should provide views of nature and increase access to natural light. Natural light has the power to improve mood and productivity. They can do this by adding more windows and glass walls, which will let light and air flow deeply into the office. The use of plants, artwork that is inspired by nature, and natural materials, such as wood and stone, to make a space appealing and efficient boosts productivity while creating a relaxing environment for people.

### **5.4. Colors and Aesthetics**

The use of light colors in the design of buildings promotes a serene atmosphere whereas brighter tones energize occupants and boost creativity. Similar to how flexible floor plans establish a mix between open and enclosed areas, architects will best utilize the space with a balance of vibrant and light hues. Specifically, the color green offers numerous advantages. Green is associated with nature, which is calming and has stress-relieving qualities in the human brain. Incorporating aesthetically appealing architecture refers to a building's scale, shape, color, movement, pattern, and visual weight. By using complementary color tones, clean lines, and balanced proportions, architects will create productive work environments that spark the imagination, arouse good feelings, and foster a sense of well-being. This psychological response will reduce tension and stress, which will improve mental health.

## **6. Limitations**

The cost of carrying out the essential steps architects must take to enhance spaces is the research's greatest restriction. Production costs will likely go up if you use eco-friendly construction materials, solar power, HVAC systems, and complex biophilic elements. Due to worries about costs and its requirement for ongoing maintenance to be successful, many contractors could be reluctant to invest in these procedures. If not properly maintained, sustainable design features are prone to getting less efficient or even dysfunctional over time. It's crucial to bear in mind, too, that these methods can result in long-term energy cost savings, lowering the building's overall maintenance expenses over time. Additionally, due to a lack of infrastructure or growth in some locations, these solutions cannot be applied everywhere. Not all structures have sufficient space to include elements like open floor plans, quiet areas, or lots of natural light. The existing structure and available space determine whether certain design components are feasible. The position of the building and the surroundings might have an impact on the environment, which is another disadvantage of using certain design options. Different cultures and nations may not value things the same way when it comes to their aesthetic appeal or calming effects. Finally, there are limitations on how architects may design buildings because of specific building laws and regulations. These laws may impose limitations on biophilic design decisions and certain aesthetically pleasing design decisions that might not be safe enough to be implemented.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research evaluated the effects of architectural design on occupant well-being and offered several solutions that architects may use to boost productivity. Architects can design spaces that promote well-being, improved performance, and pleasant experiences for occupants. Sterile and uninteresting designs can cause tension, but those that use natural components and take into account variables like lighting and color can create spaces that promote productivity and relaxation. The environment also has a major impact on architectural design. Humans and nature are becoming more and more disconnected in an urbanized society. Biophilic design, on the other hand, aims to close this gap by incorporating natural elements and systems into structures and exposing occupants to the calming and restorative effects of nature. As stated in Gillis and Gatersleben's (2015) study, in order to create settings where people feel connected, biophilic design tries to draw on the innate relationships that people have with the natural world.

There are limitations to implementing these solutions. The adoption of eco-friendly and sustainable design elements may be restricted by financial limits, continuing maintenance requirements, and infrastructure limitations. The feasibility of particular design decisions is also influenced by cultural and legal laws; however, it's important to understand that utilizing these design concepts can save money on energy costs over the long term and increase occupant satisfaction. In conclusion, architects may contribute to a built environment that improves the quality of life for both individuals and communities by embracing new design concepts and resolving. This study gives important insights into the interaction of architecture, psychology, and sustainability, allowing for future architectural design research and innovation.

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